

Special Operations, Office of the Secretary of Defense, also had some suggestions which he made to Mr. Bissell about the conduct of the Agency's anti-Castro program. For whatever reason, in late December 1960 Lansdale forwarded to Bissell a number of suggestions which had been presented to him by an Army reservist who had put in two weeks of active duty with OSO at Lansdale's direction researching Cuban political objectives. Inasmuch as the Agency had devoted many months to the study of this subject, and all other aspects of the anti-Castro effort, it appears a rather gratuitous insult that Lansdale would have forwarded this kind of paper to Bissell. 19/ What response, if any, Bissell made to this memorandum is not known.

The Special Group held its last meeting of 1960 on 29 December, and there were, in addition to the standing problem of the use of US air bases to support the operation against Cuba, the questions of the use of a Nicaraguan air base, the political organization of the Cuban exiles, and considerable discussion about the possibility of initiating action against E 6, 11 7 It was emphasized that Mr. Pawley was strongly in favor of intervention

in [11] , even suggesting that an overt operation against [66] be mounted concurrently with the Cuban operation. The members of the Special Group, however, were unwilling to buy this particular plan of action; but they did support Mr. Bissell's proposals for some limited covert action operations aimed at the [66] regime.

James H. Douglas, Deputy Secretary of Defense questioned the feasibility of "expanding the initial beachhead into a full-scale takeover of the Cuban Government"; but Mr. Bissell pointed out that such a project was unrealistic unless "One or all of the following situations develop: (a) overt support, (b) a major revolutionary uprising, (c) massive use of air support." 20/ The Group was apparently in agreement that the Agency should make every effort to insure that no abortive small-scale insurrections be attempted to overthrow Castro. 21/

In view of the fact that the US would break diplomatic relations with Cuba on 3 January 1961, the minutes of the Special Group meeting of 29 December 1960 present an interesting historical problem. In summarizing Livingston Merchant's report of his

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meeting with President Eisenhower, on 28 December, the minutes of the Special Group Meeting of 29 December read as follows:

The latter [President Eisenhower] made two points: (a) it would be desirable to obtain the cooperation and support of individual Latin American Governments, (b) it would be desirable, if possible, for US to break relations with Cuba, in concert with other countries some time before January 20th. 22/

In contrast to the suggestion that the US break relations with Cuba, prior to the inauguration of Kennedy, General Goodpaster's record of the Merchant-Eisenhower meeting of 28 December reported that:

He, [President Eisenhower] thought, however, that [Presidents] Frondizi, Prado, and others should take diplomatic initiative to get Latin American countries to take a position that they would like to remove Castro from power, but, lacking the means to do so, would like the US to take the lead. The President said it was clear to him that Latin Americans must be brought to see the necessity of action. He was inclined to think that it might be time to recognize the anti-Castro front as the Cuban Government. He added that he would like to see a definite move taken in this matter before January 20th, and said that the State Department should be thinking of some definite action that could be brought about before that time. 23/

"Thinking of some definite action" differs considerably from the suggestion that the President thought

it would be "desirable" to break relations with Cuba prior to 20 January of 1961.

At the Special Group meeting of 29 December 1960, it also was suggested by Mr. Merchant that the Group's membership for discussions on Cuba be expanded to include Ambassador Willauer, Assistant Secretary Thomas Mann, and C. Tracy Barnes. 24/ As already has been noted, in his retrospective view of the Bay of Pigs operation Jake Esterline was quite forceful in his opinion that the Agency's representatives at such high level meetings should have been someone like either himself or Col. Jack Hawkins who were the most knowledgeable about the status of the operation and, indeed, the whole operational plan.*

* It is the considered opinion of the author of this history that Esterline had a valid criticism. A review of the records of the Bay of Pigs Operation, indicates that one of the most voluminous correspondents was C. Tracy Barnes, that a great deal of the written material is repetitious and nauseam, and that Barnes belabored issues which were common knowledge to the principals in WH/4. Illustrative of this, for example, was a 28 December 1960 memorandum which Barnes wrote to Jake Esterline. It began as follows: "It has been a little while since we have had an internal DDP hoe down on your project. In the meantime, a number of important points have been raised." 25/

The memorandum then proceeded to run through all of the issues which, by this time, were common knowledge (footnote continued on following page)

On 2 January 1961 Fidel Castro notified the United States Government that it would have to cut its Embassy staff in Havana to eleven persons. On 3 January 1961, President Eisenhower held a meeting at the White House to discuss the Cuban situation. In addition to the President, and the Secretaries of State, Defense, and Treasury, the participants included the members of the Special Group, plus General Goodpaster, Mr. Bissell, Thomas Mann, and Tracy Barnes. Among principal questions, of course, were if and when the United States should break off diplomatic relations with Cuba; and after some initial hesitation, before the day was over the United States did break relations officially with the Cuban Government.*

to those who were even marginally involved in planning the anti-Castro operation and contributed nothing in particular to understanding of any of them.

Similarly, Barnes' memorandum for the DCI in preparation for a 3 January policy meeting, rehearsed the same information that Barnes had presented to Chief, WH/4, just a few days before. 26/ Barnes appears to have suffered a severe case of verbal diarrhea.

* Before the firm decision was made to break diplomatic relations, there was great concern within the Agency that the COS, a communicator, and a PM officer, and possibly a fourth individual be retained as members of the Staff. 27/

The other subject of conversation was whether there now was cause or reason for direct US intervention in Cuba, and the decision was that no such action should be taken unless the Cuban Government took aggressive action against US citizens in Cuba or damaged official US property (e.g., Guantanamo). In the course of the discussion about the status of Agency planning for anti-Castro activities, the question was raised about increasing the number of trainees. This was ruled out pending the suitability of training sites to handle additional numbers. Training sites in the US still were denied, in part, again, because of the fear of compromising the US position in the Organization of American States or in the United Nations.

The high level White House meeting also agreed that it would be useful to brief members of the new administration, particularly the Secretary of State, but "no definite schedule was agreed upon but the consensus [*sic*] of the meeting was that appropriate briefings should be considered for the near future." 28/

In the few days following the 3 January decision to break relations with the Castro Government, the

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Agency retained control of US communications out of Havana -- the Ambassador deciding that he preferred to relieve the female Department of State communications officer and retain the services of her male counterpart from the Agency. During this hectic period, the communications officer was instructed to pack up as much gear as possible and destroy that which remained. Even if all the gear were not destroyed, CIA's Director of Communications indicated "there would not be any extreme compromise." In any event, however, the last message from Havana Station -- on 7 January 1961 at 1638Z -- stated

"This last msg from HAVA Station. All files and crypto material destroyed ... on evening 6 Jan [1961] Swiss amb placed "Carta de Proteccion" notices on emb doors minimizing possibility takeover of bldg by GOC.* 29/

Even as the debate over the breaking of diplomatic relations was taking place within the Eisenhower administration, Col. Jack Hawkins addressed a memorandum to Jake Esterline, Chief, WH/4 which provided an excellent summary of the policy decisions which needed

* Authorization for complete shutdown had been set for 0300Z on 7 January 1961. 30/

to be made if strike operations were to be conducted against the Castro government. In the course of his eight page memorandum, Hawkins reiterated the need for resolution of the problem that had particularly bothered the Special Group -- that was whether the Kennedy administration was interested in following through on the plans that had been made. Assuming that the Kennedy administration did intend to follow through on the program which had been initiated, Hawkins suggested that considering the rapid build up of Castro's military forces the strike operations be conducted not later than 1 March 1961. The question of air strikes was basic to Hawkins's planning -- on this he was quite firm. In discussing the general question of air operations Hawkins said:

It is axiomatic in amphibious operations that control of air and sea in the objective area is absolutely required. The Cuban Air Force and naval vessels capable of opposing our landing must be knocked out or neutralized before our amphibious shipping makes its final run in to the beach. If this is not done, we will be courting disaster.

Then, by specific recommendations, Hawkins urged the following:

1. That the air preparation commence not later than dawn on D minus 1 Day.

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2. That any move to curtail the number of aircraft to be employed from those available be firmly resisted.

3. That the operation be abandoned if policy does not provide for use of adequate tactical air support.

In order to insure the success of both the air strike and the air drop operations which would provide the logistical support for the troops holding the lodgment on Cuban soil, Hawkins urged, as he had in the past, authorization for the use of contract American pilots, the use of the airfield at Puerto Cabezas as an advance strike base, and the use of air bases in the United States for the launching of logistical flight operations.* 31/

Much the same ground indicated in Hawkins memorandum was rehearsed in preparing Mr. Barnes and the DCI for a Special Group meeting of 5 January 1961.

* There is no indication that Hawkins ever changed his attitude about the need for the introduction of some US pilots into both the strike and logistics air operations, even though his much quoted cable of 13 April 1961 from Puerto Cabezas repeated the high praise for the B-26 pilots who were about to undertake the D-2 air strike. See Volume I of the Official History of the Bay of Pigs Operation, *Air Operations*, Part III, A for discussion of the Hawkins cable in the context of the air operations.

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Somewhat more emphasis than Hawkins had given to it was placed on the political organization and the needs for structuring the exile political group to conform accurately to the sentiments of those Cubans who did oppose Castro. Otherwise, much of the same focus was to be given to the questions regarding air bases, the size of the invasion force, and the number of trainees who could be accommodated in the camps, and other of the problems that had already been discussed time and time again. 32/ Similarly, in discussions prior to the 12 January 1961 meeting of the Special Group, much of this same ground continued to be replowed without any positive resolution by the Special Group members. 33/

During the course of the frequent sessions of the Special Group in the final weeks of the Eisenhower administration, the Director of Central Intelligence also was required to make a presentation before the CIA Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee on 6 January of 1961. Among other things, the record of this meeting stated as follows:

Mr. Dulles then gave a fairly detailed picture of CIA action with respect to Cuba, mentioning the two-pronged program of

propaganda including radio and publications and the paramilitary effort. Again he pointed out that this is an expensive program running to approximately \$28 million. Mr. Dulles discussed the radio effort and paramilitary effort in some detail, indicating the numbers of Cubans being trained and the supply efforts and the bases. 34/

Because of the subsequent charges which would be made by historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. and others writing on the Bay of Pigs, it is important to emphasize that among other CIA personnel attending this briefing was Robert Amory, Jr., the Deputy Director for Intelligence, who, according to Schlesinger and some of the later "experts," was supposed to be in almost total ignorance of any planning for an operation such as took place at the Bay of Pigs.*

* Other Agency personnel in attendance at this briefing were General Cabell, DDIC; Colonel L. K. White, Deputy Director for Support; Richard Helms, Chief of Operations for DDP; Emmett Echols, Director of Personnel, and John Warner, Legislative Counsel. It also should be noted that Mr. William A. Tidwell, Jr. of Amory's office was appointed in January 1961 to be Chief of the Office of Operations in Miami. 35/ Organizationally at this time, the Office of Operations was under the Deputy Director for Intelligence. In view of the efforts being made in the Miami area to recruit Cubans for training in the exile Brigade, it is inconceivable that Tidwell and the Deputy Director for Intelligence were not fully aware of the plans that were being made to unseat Castro until after the invasion had collapsed at Playa Giron.

On 10 January 1961, President Eisenhower got involved in a meeting concerning the planned operations against Castro. On that day the New York Times broke a story about the training of the Cuban troops in Guatemala. As the ex-President himself wrote:

On the morning of January 10 [1961], the New York Times carried an article, with a map, describing the training of anti-Castro forces in Guatemala ... It told most of the story. I decided that we should say nothing at all about this article. Believing that my successor might want some day to assist the refugee forces to move into Cuba, I considered that we were limited in what we could say about them. 36/

Whether a meeting had been planned prior to the appearance of the *New York Times* article is not known, but the Senate Foreign Relations Committee did call on the administration to send a representative up to the Hill on 12 January 1961, in order to provide further explanation of the *Times* article. Of the two candidates being considered to appear before the Senate, Thomas Mann, Assistant Secretary of State for American Republic Affairs, or DCI Dulles, it was decided to send Mr. Dulles to appear before the Senate Committee. However, President Eisenhower

raised certain questions as to the right of a Committee to ask questions on foreign

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policy affecting the security of the United States. He [Eisenhower] commented that when this is demanded as a right you are "sunk," and wondered how much right have they got, inasmuch as the Constitution says that it is the responsibility of the Chief Executive. 37/

The culmination of the Special Group discussions, which had taken place with increasing frequency between mid-November 1960 and mid-January 1961, was the report of the Joint Planning Committee issued by Willauer on 18 January 1961. The conclusions were predictable -- there were decisions that needed to be made, but these could not be made until the new administration became fully aware of the extent of the anti-Castro programs that had been evolving. As Willauer himself said in his final memo:

In the absence of these decisions, or at least most of them, there is a grave danger that the December 6 plan (updated) may have to be abandoned, as an *effective* means of overthrowing Castro without more overt support, and that the only practical course of action for the *physical overthrow* of Castro, will be either: (1) open U.S. war with Cuba, or (2) a seven-month overt training by the U.S. on United States soil, of a Cuban-Latin American invasion force, which will be planned to strike with at least overt U.S. logistical support. * 38/

* Willauer probably meant to refer to the 8 December 1960 plan. See pp. 173 ff.

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perhaps best illustrative of the merry-go-round which the Special Group had been riding for at least two months was Willauer's closing statement:

In our discussions we weighed without coming to a conclusion the advantages of a rapid, effective action by direct war in terms of getting matters over with without a long buildup of world opinion vs. the inevitability of such a build up under any seven month program. 38/

Having reviewed the meetings during the last few weeks of the Eisenhower administration, it is interesting to review the comments of some of those who were principally involved, as they looked back on that period. One of the most immediate responses was found in Fidel Castro's virtuoso performance for the Cuban television audience on 23 April 1961 when he explained the invasion to them. Among other things, Castro claimed:

That on certain occasions, we have also been in danger of direct aggression. This danger always has been lurking about us and at certain times has gathered considerable support in the minds of leading circles of the United States. One of those moments when this type of direct aggression was very near was at the end of December [1960] and the beginning of [January 1961], and that is to say, during the last days of the Eisenhower administration. 40/

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So concerned was Castro at this time that he put his armed forces in a state of alert for a two week period, covering the transition from the Eisenhower to the Kennedy administration. 41/

The other principal protagonist at this time, remembered it in a somewhat different manner. The former US President wrote of this period in the following manner:

Covert training of exiles for any possible future operations against Castro was going forward. Units were growing steadily in strength and efficiency against the time when actual tactical planning could be undertaken. In December [1960], I suggested to the State Department that the time might be propitious for organizing a "front" against Castro among the refugees, with the United States recognizing the leader and his associates as the legal government of Cuba, with the proviso, however, that the exiles themselves would voluntarily select from their own number an acceptable "head of government." I added that if they could do so at once, I'd like to see recognition accorded promptly -- if possible, before January 20 ...

So, to the incoming administration, we left units of Cuban refugees busily training and preparing hopefully for a return to their native land. Because they had as yet been unable to find the leader they wanted -- a national leader to be both anti-Castro and anti-Batista -- it was impossible to make specific

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plans for a military invasion, However, their hatred of Castro, their patriotism, and their readiness to sacrifice for the restoration and freedom in Cuba could not be doubted. 42/

In the statement just quoted, Eisenhower's emphasis was on the fact that during his administration all that took place was a training program -- that there was no specific plan for the invasion of Cuba. This was re-emphasized in an interview that he held on 10 September 1965 when he said: "There was no tactical or operational plan even discussed" when he turned the presidency over to John F. Kennedy. 43/

According to this same interview:

The retiring President stressed that there had been no decision as to how the Cuban forces would be used, if at all. Eisenhower had made no commitments that might bind the new President in dealing with the Castro problem. In fact, the armed refugee group was still so small and relatively unprepared that it could easily have been disbanded if the incoming administration considered its existence unnecessary.

And, more specifically,

Eisenhower felt that Kennedy shared his judgment that the new administration need not rush a decision regarding the Cubans. "At no time did I put before anybody anything that could be called a plan (to invade Cuba)," declares the former President. He emphasizes that there was "no mandate, no

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commitment by me, or by anyone in my administration," and he doubts that Kennedy felt "he was frozen to any position by me." 44/

Gordon Gray, President Eisenhower's National Security Adviser, also supported his former boss when queried about the Eisenhower role in the Bay of Pigs activity, stressing that the emphasis during Eisenhower's administration was on training the Cuban exiles and providing them with equipment. Like the former President, Gray, too, said that there was "no military plan".

The definition of a military plan, however, seems to have focused on an actual site for the landing; and in this sense, Gray certainly was telling the truth because no such choice had been made at the time that Eisenhower left office. In his own words, Gray stated:

There wasn't any military plan formulated by the time the Eisenhower administration went out. Of course, the President was fully aware of and conversant with the decision to train and arm individuals. And the concept was one that was sort of changing in the Eisenhower Administration. First we were thinking in terms of the old infiltration of small groups. Then they were thinking of the possibility of landing of people, unit sized groups. And no decisions had been reached at that time. It was only that

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there was training. That was clearly authorized, and it was clearly contemplated that there would be or could be a military action. But it simply was not true that Kennedy inherited a plan that he couldn't change. As a matter of fact, the planning that was done in his administration was changed. The Bay of Pigs was not the first landing point. That was changed. But none of that, no planning process in the Eisenhower administration had got to the point of discussing what would be the landing point. 45/

What both Gray and Eisenhower conveniently ignored, as has been pointed out in the preceding discussion, was the major change that was made in the concept in November of 1960. What was to have been an infiltration of numerous small teams of communicators and PM trainers became an amphibious invasion plan calling for a major enlargement of the exile Brigade and an air operations plan which would be critical to both the Brigade's landing and its ability to be sustained once ashore in Cuba. What was yet undecided as Eisenhower was succeeded by Kennedy were the issues which the Special Group had argued throughout the weeks from mid-November into January -- the number of troops that should be or could be trained, the facilities that would be available for training sites (possibly in third countries or in the United

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States), the possible commitment of the United States personnel (as "volunteers" or contracts), and possible overt US intervention to remove Fidel Castro.* 46/

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* Despite the availability of documentary records and autobiographical information about President Eisenhower's role in the anti-Castro program, it is interesting to the historian that the subject of the Bay of Pigs apparently was banned as a topic in oral history interviews conducted with Eisenhower and various of his senior subordinates who were close to the operation. Included among this group, in addition to Eisenhower himself, were James H. Douglas, Jr. (DOD), Thomas Mann (State), Gen. David Shoup (USMC), Thomas S. Gates, Jr. (DOD), and Livingston Merchant (State).

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